Memories of the lonesome trail ...

PRIMER 338 MEMORIES OF THE LONESOME TRAIL

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THE LITTLE LADY OF THE LONESOME TRAIL

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THE STORY OF THE LONESOME TRAIL

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Did you ever hear of “The Little Lady of the Lonesome Trail?”

Probably not. She is not given to telling of her achievements.

To learn the reason why, one must go back almost to the middle of the last century. The story is one which naturally falls into three chapters named for the three graces—Faith, Hope and Love. It was the faith of the Little Lady that led her a thousand miles across the country to a land where the wilderness closely hedged the small and scattered settlements; it was hope that she might help the cause of Christian civilization in the new land that gave her courage for the journey, and it was love of the good and love of a devoted young husband that upbore her on the journey.

In those days, the Little Lady was Mrs. James Peet. It was in 1856 that she gave her hand in marriage to the young missionary whose name she was to bear, knowing all

the hardship, the privation and the obstacles to be met in the field on which she had set her eyes. Mr. Peet had been a missionary among the slums of the big city, but their honeymoon they had talked about the need of the Indians and settlers in the far-off Lake Superior country. And she had said: “I will gladly go to do what I can.”

It was a long, hard trip. From New York to St. Louis by boat. Then to St. Paul by steamer. Young, dark and very pretty, the bride was the life of boat's company. Day after day as the steamer ascended the Mississippi, the steamer grew narrower and narrower, the bluffs lifted their rocky crests in picturesque wildness and the towns passed became smaller and smaller. At Wabasha they saw the first Indians and there was a rush to the side as the boat slid by the smoking teepees, the grazing ponies, the sprawling dogs and babies and the slatternly squaws. The Little Lady did not join in the jeers at the filth and crudities of the Indians. She could see souls amid the squalor. These were the people she would help.

There was a short stay in St. Paul where they were joined by their guide, the Rev. E. F. Ely, a Presbyterian Elder, and then came

The Beautiful Dells of the St. Croix

the Lonesome Trail. It is not lonesome today, though it is still a trial following the old route taken by trappers and couriers du bois in passing between Minneapolis an St. Paul, and the head of the lakes at Superior, Wis. Like the trails of the early days, it ws the shortest possible route, but where it was then marked by blazed trees and the vague prints of moccasined feet, it is today blazoned with telegraph poles an laid with the 90-pound rails of the Soo Line's new extension. In 1856, when Harriet Peet traversed the trail, as the first white woman to make the trip, it was a matter of days. In 1912 it requires less than five hours to be whisked from the Falls of St. Anthony to the cool and shimmering waters of Allouez Bay.

At the distance of 56 years the Little Lady recalls her first trip through the winter wilderness. She tells of the first day when the path was broad and easy and a hotel

awaited them t Danbury, as a mere pleasure trip in spite of the cold and the snow. But the day after, as they left the signs of civilization, the trail narrowed.

Then she tells of the silent, silent woods, the grim shadows by dusk and the velvet blackness of the night. Tells of the starlit skies, when, wrapped in blanket, the young girl lay by the side of her husband and looked up through the pines into the face of the world and listened to the murmur of the forest life about her.

She tells of the Indians that slipped silently and grave faced along the trail, of the trappers, strange bearded men who had not seen a woman in many months. She remembers singing old fashioned songs as she tramped along through the snows, of laughing with glee as the squirrels frisked about the trees, of kneeling in prayer and reading aloud from the Bible when their journey halted for the Sabbath.

She remembers with a shudder the time the sleigh slipped and turned and she was hurled out with packing case across her breast, while her husband, wild with fear, worked to remove the weight. Nine days they struggled on in their lonely way. Night after night they slept beside the roaring camp fires while the wolves prowled about the circle of light.

The road was poor at best in outline, although the snows made the going less difficult than one would think. The cold was softened by the mantle of forest that shut out the cutting wind. The beauty of the summer woods was past and the gaunt, gray trunks of the countless trees made an endless monotony of scene that with a maid less brave or of fewer joys would have spelt horror.

But she only sang the louder when the gloom approached. At meal time she could scarcely wait for the fire to be built so that she might put her little iron kettle to singing over the flames. She has that kettle yet and it rests in a place of honor in her parlor. All day she sat in the sleigh moving only at time when she got out to run by the side of the slow moving vehicle. She ha a perfect trust in three things, God, her husband, and her own

ability. She was quite sure that none of the three would desert her and this helped her in keeping

They are Full of Black Bass

a light heart. Long and hard the journey and Harriet Peet came through well and happy. The trail, for all its toil and hardships, had been a happy one. And she had won the distinction of being the very first white woman to make the journey.

She is 85 years old now and the mate of her girlhood has long been dead. She married again, a Charles Jones, now, too, dead. She is living with her daughter in a little home at 717 16th Ave. S. E., Minneapolis, Minn. When she makes the trip again it is doubtful if she even guesses how great the change will be.

Where forest glades once reigned will be broad farms and tilled acres. The ancient hills that ringed in the wilds will bear towns and villages. The forest path will be the trail of glittering rails and the clumsy sleigh of long ago will be superseded by all that is modern and wonderful in railroad construction. The places she remembers for a great rock, a tall tree or fantastic-shaped mound, will now be marked with never, man-build monuments and only the skies and the river will be unchanged and eternal.

ON THE OLD STAGE ROUTE (Published about 1868 in the Gentleman's Magazine) FROM SUPERIOR TO ST. PAUL

The mud wagon, which was called the stage, was ready to start for St. Paul; and the question arose whether to undertake the trip, or return in the steamer. The honest agent of the stage line cautioned us that the route was rough and hard. “I should be sorry to see ladies set out on such an expedition,” said he. But the latest guidebook contained assurances that the road was in good repair, the management of the line perfect, and the journey easy to be made. And so, blind to the evidence of our eyes, and deaf to the warnings of the agent, we took our seats.

The vehicle was not elegant to look upon, nor easy to ride in. Four hoops over the top were covered with heavy canvas, to keep off the sun and the rain; but the sides were tattered, and the whole was dirty. There were no backs to the seats, nor places to rest our heads; and the thin, hard cushions of hay had become polished down to a high degree of smoothness. Yet we started with buoyant spirits, high hopes, and many a merry jest. We were encouraged by a recent traveler over the route, who said that whatever other inconveniences

Watching the Trains Flash By

we might meet with, at least “the grub was good.” Accordingly, we looked forward to fresh eggs, and sweet bread and milk, served in neat log-houses, by some fair flower of the wilderness, with clean hands and tidy dress; and we anticipated with found longings these plain, delicious meals, such as the pampered appetites of the rich and proud are strangers to. This dear delusion was dispelled at the first stopping place. Our frugal repast, which we partook of in the open air, was not equal to the recommendation of the traveler, nor yet to our own more modest expectations. Still we lost not hope, but pressed cheerily on, through the unbroken forest, passing no house till we reached the next station, a distance of about fifteen miles. Here a young woman twenty-five years old, weighing nearly four hundred pounds prepared our supper.

Several difficulties prevented our progress from being either rapid or agreeable. The wagon has been described already. After the first few miles we had but two horses. The road was full of rocks and holes, and had been made muddy by recent rains. We could go but three miles an hour, and sometimes not so much. We were attended by a constant cloud of mosquitoes, which, in spite of mosquito bars over our heads, and all precautions which we could use to keep them off, would reach our ankles, necks, wrists and faces. (The “mosquito bar” is like a veil, and made to fall from the hat all around the head and neck.) The mosquitoes of this region deserve very special mention for of all the annoyances to which the traveler is subjected, they are the worst. Though not larger

than the common mosquitoes, they are not only more numerous, but far more intelligent, virulent, and venomous. They never tire. One of our drivers told us that all other insects sometimes sleep, but mosquitoes never sleep. It is said that they will bite through a heavy buckskin glove. They certainly will seek out the seams upon the backs of such gloves, through which they bite without difficulty.

Darkness overtook us while on our way, and then our serious troubles, began. We were soon set in a mud hole, and had to alight. Escaping from this we afterwards get stuck so fast that our poor horses were unable to start even the empty wagon. We pushed and pulled, hallooed and whipped, to no purpose. One horse fell down. There was mud before, behind, and on both sides. The forest seemed interminable. Bears and lynxes made the road dangerous for a solitary traveler. Mosquitoes settled upon us in immense swarms. We had no means of making a fire. The driver could not tell where we were, or how far from the next station. What was to be done? Some of us were anxious and dismayed, but nothing could repress Fannie's spirits, and she asked in an arch ton, as she was carried over a mud puddle, “Are you not glad you came?” It turned out that we were about three miles from the station: Two of us walked there for help and fresh horses; but our poor old horses at last recovered their strength enough to pull out the wagon, and so came up just in time to save sending back for them. As we walked along our plight was no better than the Irishman's,

The Finest Dairy Country in the World

who, having agreed to work his passage on a canal boat, was made to drive the horses on the tow path. “Bedad,” said he, “but for the name of the thing I might as well go afoot.”

Fresh troubles arose. We were too tired to go further that night. But the new driver, a foreigner, insisted that the mail, already late, must be carried forward at once. “I shall pay fine of fifty dollar if I wait,” said he. This obstinate man gave no heed to use when we told him that ladies, after walking in the mud so far as our ladies been obliged to do, with wet feet, must have rest. And so, after coaxing and threatening, we finally bribed him to wait

until daylight. It was necessary to bribe or whip him; and we bribed him. This mail, which seemed so important to him, contained, as we afterwards found, only about a dozen letters and half as many newspapers.

Where should we sleep? There were two houses, situated by a beautiful clear lake. One house was old and filthy; the other, through new, was but little cleaner. Both were filled with smoke to keep out the mosquitoes. It was only a choice between two very poor places. The ladies went to the new house. The other proved to be the regular stage house, but was so repulsive that to sleep there seemed impossible. It contained, however, one luxury—some ice water. We sought to take some to our ladies; but the hostess utterly refused to allow a cupful to be carried from her house. No appeal to her sympathy, no promise of payment, would avail; and so it had to be taken against her consent. Poor woman! I have never seen such utter unkindness, such a want of common human sympathy, as she displayed. The secret was, that she felt hurt because the ladies had gone to the other house. Under other circumstances she might have been civil, kind, and perhaps even generous.

What a night it was! The Frenchwoman, at the new house, who was already in bed, got up and worked till morning in preparing our breakfast, which, after all we could scarcely taste. But surely she had done what she could. We therefore paid a sum which was said to be too much, and begged them in the future to do likewise for other travelers who might be cast away, as we were, upon that desolate road.

We journeyed forth through the early morning hours in doubt and sorrow. But jolting proved an effectual remedy for headaches, the wagon contrived to hold together, and the horses managed with difficulty to go two miles and a half an hour. At the ferry over Kettle River we submitted without a murmur to the petty swindle of an exaction of toll from each of us. One of the drivers had warned us that the keeper of the station at this place was “just a hog”; and we were glad to get out of his hands. Passing this river we had the worst road and the best driver of the whole route. Nothing could disturb his good humor. He was

a little Frenchman, with a round, jolly face, and said with a smile, that he was put on that part of the route to keep the passengers pleasant. ‘They sometimes scold at me.” he said, “but it's no use. I am not to blame and they can't make me cross.”

“But your horses are not good,” we said.

Herds of Prize Winners Everywhere

“No. they sends me the worst horses they've got, for me to kill them on this road. They sends them to me and I kills them.”

We offered to walk at some places where the road seemed dry enough. “I likes better to have my passengers ride,” he answered. “You pays to ride, and ought to get your money's worth. They sends me these old horses to kill, and if you wants to drive faster, I drives faster. I drives just as my passengers wants.”

“This is certainly rather a has road,” said our colonel from Iowa. The colonel had served in the war of the rebellion, and was used to rough roads.

“Yes,” said Fannie gayly, “and if it lasts much longer it will make mincemeat of us.”

Fannie was our orator's daughter. She was just fifteen and was our pet. Therefore her opinions received great consideration from all of us. Accordingly, we told the driver that he need not drive any faster.

It was lucky he did not attempt it; for at this point one of the horses fell down. Our imperturbable driver spoke no word, and showed no sign of impatience, but quietly got off, unhitched the traces, just as if this was an incident quite in the common course, and standing over shoes in the mud, tried to pull him up.

“Oh, don't whip him!” exclaimed Fannie.

“I speaks to him first, and then if he doesn't get up, I licks him,” said the Frenchman, pleasantly; and then he gently whipped him up. all this was done with such good nature, that one of us standing by on a log, laughing, asked him if he never got out of humor. “I never was sick a day in my life,” said he. “But do you never get cross?” “No, it's no use,” he replied. “I drove a pair of cattle five hundred miles through the woods, and never was cross once.” And we believed him. Such a driver as this wastes his time and talents up in that wilderness. He should go out upon the great Western plains, where, even among Ben Holladay's famous drivers, he would take high rank.

At last, in the afternoon of the second day, we reached a little house, where we were glad enough to find a woman with a kind heart, good manners, and some knowledge of cookery. The roads, to be sure, were still rough, the mosquitoes thick, and the horses poor. At night we came to the little village of Chenwatana, seventy-seven miles from St. Paul,where a few hours' sleep and good food gave strength and courage to start at half-past three in the morning on our last day's journey.

At the town of Sunrise, on the St. Croix River, the drunken landlord of the hotel had an amusing altercation with the driver, for the custody of our single trunk, during the time of changing wagons. The landlord thought himself responsible for the safety of the luggage, and insisted on taking forcible possession of it. This controversy over, we proceeded on our way in a somewhat better wagon, but still with horses scarcely able to go. The forests had given place to ask openings, and the mosquitoes had nearly disappeared. With better horses and a better coach this part of the route would be really pleasant.

Sixteen miles from St. Paul we took our last driver, who was vexed because we were several hours behind time, and fretted at everything.

The Farmer's are all Prosperous.

As his horses were led out, our orator remarked, by way of encouragement. “Your team is much better than those above here.”

“No, it isn't,” answered the driver; “they have just as good teams above, and might have got the stage here earlier.”

“Well, I am not much of a judge of horses, but I can measure a man pretty well, and have taken your gauge exactly.”

The driver moved off sulkily.

We reached St. Paul just after midnight, having traveled for twenty-one hours continuously, with less fatigue and discomfort than on either of the preceding days. We had passed over the longest and worst stage route east of the Missisippi. The combination of inconveniences was really something extraordinary. No one would think a journey of only one hundred and sixty-three miles could be so hard. But this is, probably, the worst-managed route in the country. Two of us had been for several years in the army. Another had traveled by stage two thousand miles across the continent. We were not fastidious, expecting unreasonable things. But we all agreed that this experience was fairly entitled to rank among the severest hardships we had ever encountered. Riding for five consecutive days and nights across the plains of Nebraska and Colorado, in one of the tolerably comfortable overland coaches, was a joke in comparison. To one gentleman, whose business compelled him to undertake the same trip, our friend from Pennsylvania remarked, “Before you reach Superior you will wish you were dead, and had got the money for your clothes.” Yet Fannie and her mother, by their constant cheerfulness and good humor, kept up the spirits of us all.

While in St. Paul we had a curiosity to learn if the agent there would recommend the route. Two of us accordingly called upon him for this purpose, and the following conversation was had:

“Are you the agent of the stage line to Superior?”

“Yes.”

“How is the road?”

“Very good.”

“Do many passengers travel over it?”

“Yes. Four went this morning. Six came in last evening.”

“Is it passable for ladies?”

“Oh yes. Two came in last evening.”

“What sort of a carriage is used?”

“A nice covered hack, right through.”

“How about mosquitoes?”

“Well, it is not necessary to put a copper kettle on your head; but I would advise taking a mosquito bar.”

“What is the food?”

“Good; venison, fish, and wild game. It is better living at some of the stations than at the hotels in St. Paul.”

“How many horses do you use?”

“A hack with two horses to Chengwatana, and then from there to Superior a coach and four horses.”

“What sort of a coach?”

“One like that there,” pointing to a placard advertisement, with a picture of a Concord thoroughbrace coach, and four galloping horses, and a long line of dust behind.

A Picture of Quiet, Peach and Comfort

“Why do you make this change at Chengwatana?”

“Because the road is better up there.”

“The road is better, then, on the upper part of the route?”

“Yes.”

“Is any part of the road bad?”

“About ten miles is rather hard. The rest is good.”

“Is the stage driven at night?”

“Oh, no. You will stop at about six, and start at six in the morning.”

“But it there should be a delay somewhere, would you not be obliged to drive in the night, to get the mail along?”

“No, indeed. We have three days for that, which is plenty of time.”

“But might not some driver think he ought to go right on, and so make it hard for the ladies?”

“Such a thing could not happen. If we should hear of such a thing, we should discharge the driver on the spot.”

“Then there is nothing to prevent ladies from going over the road with comfort?”

“Oh, no.”

This conversation, upon being reported, gave great amusement to our fellow passengers, and to others in St. Paul; and the Colonel could not resist the temptation to call upon the agent and inquire for himself. The agent assured him that only six miles of the whole road were rough, while a part was macadamized; and upon being asked what was the chance of securing seats for the next trip, said that two persons had been making inquiries, and would probably take passage, with a lady. The same afternoon the minister also called, and received similar misinformation.

We did not inform the agent that we had just come over his route. The joke was too

good and the fun too delicate to be marred in that manner. But we returned east by another way. Indeed, we heard of no stranger who ever voluntarily went over the road twice. When good surgeons are in attendance at each station, that will help matters somewhat. For ourselves, we got well in a few days from our bruises and abrasions, and counted ourselves fortunate in escaping thus; and, for the sake of our friend, the agent at St. Paul, we hope he may never meet anybody whom he has beguiled into taking the trip from St. Paul to Superior.

THE LITTLE LADY OF THE LONESOME TRAIL AS SHE IS TODAY

BETWEEN St. Paul and Minneapolis Duluth and Superior

The completion of the new Twin City-Duluth-Superior Line has opened a new highway for comfortable travel between these cities. That part of the line which runs from Minneapolis to Frederic has had a regular train service since 1901, and the country it traversed is well known, it being a rich farming and dairying district. The glimpses afforded of pastoral

simplicity and content, of pretty little cottages nestling back into sheltering groves of hardwood; of herds of peacefully grazing cattle and the bountiful fields; present a picture of happiness and plenty as to be a righteous cause of envy.

Beyond Frederic the lake dotted, almost virgin forest, will afford a treat to anyone whether or not acquainted with the primeval beauty of the northern parts of the wonderful states of Wisconsin and Minnesota. Mile after mile the pictures glide by, swiftly changing, always different, all of them fascinating in their personification of the peace, quiet and restfulness that nature alone in her most pleasant moods can create. The gemlike lakes on either hand glisten in the sunshine like polished mirrors, broken only by the leap of the black bass. The rippling, murmuring rills and creeks wandering apparently aimlessly through the natural meadows and under the sheltering branches of centuries old leafy monarchs, and filled with speckled beauties, are silver ribbons that the eye delights to follow until some turn of the track shuts them from view.

To the average traveler the journey is a revelation as to the possibilities of this territory and it will be but a short time when this route in its entire length will be through a thickly settled and prosperous dairy country.

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